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DE RUEHLB #0201 0511054
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201054Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4254
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000201

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: WEST BEKAA-RASHAYA

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (U) This is the sixth in a series of snapshots we are producing on key electoral districts ("quda") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) West Bekaa-Rashaya is the agricultural heartland of Lebanon. No single confessional group dominates this district, which lies in southeast Lebanon on the border with Syria. Although Sunnis enjoy a plurality, large Christian, Druze, and Shia populations are also present.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) The six parliamentary seats in West Bekaa-Rashaya will be hotly contested unless an electoral deal to split the seats evenly between March 14 and the opposition is solidified before the June 7 elections. Analysts differ on projections for results in this region if it is contested. Violence and Syrian meddling are wildcards in the confessionally-diverse area. End summary.

WEST BEKAA-RACHAYA:
A BRIEF OVERVIEW

[¶4.](#) (U) The West Bekaa-Rachaya district, two qadas merged into one electoral area, is the agricultural heartland of Lebanon and one of its most confessionally diverse districts. No sect represents a majority of registered voters. Sunnis constitute 47 percent of the West Bekaa-Rashaya population, but there are significant Christian (25 percent), Druze (15 percent), and Shia (13 percent) communities also.

[¶5.](#) (U) The distribution of West Bekaa's six parliamentary seats is: two Sunni, one Shia, one Maronite, one Druze, and one Greek Orthodox seat. An alliance in 2005 between the Sunni Future Movement, Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Shia Amal Movement, and Shia Hizballah led those groups to win the district's six seats.

FACTORS AT PLAY
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

[¶6.](#) (SBU) In this confessionally diverse district, violence between factions in the run-up to elections is possible. For example, scuffles occurred in January between supporters of MP Saad Hariri's Future Movement and pro-Syrian Union Party head Abdel Rahim Mrad. Although March 14 and March 8 contacts agree that an electoral alliance -- that would split the seats evenly between the sides -- would help to maintain calm in the region, neither side has made strong efforts to reach such a deal.

¶7. (SBU) Analysts differ on the results of the West Bekaa-Rashaya district in the absence of a deal. March 14 candidates, including incumbents Maronite Robert Ghanem and Druze Wael Abu Faour, believe they can score a victory here. However, opposition Christian figures argue that the large Shia population that voted for Future's Christian candidates in 2005 will vote for March 8 Christians in ¶2009. Because no electoral arrangement yet exists, all parties are increasing their campaigning to prepare for a battle at the polls.

¶8. (SBU) Syrian involvement in this area is also a factor. Our contacts say that Lebanese figures from the Bekaa have traveled more frequently to Syria since the establishment of diplomatic relations in October 2008. Mrad and his pro-Syrian Union party are influential and well-connected in the region. Communists and other leftists are also present.

SISON